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ABSTRACT

Based in part on a study at Towson State University, Maryland, retention was found to be linked to advising. In response to this defined linkage, a freshman advising program was developed which emphasized mandatory participation, increased faculty awareness of the complexities of advising, self-assessment, the merger of Academic Affairs with Student Services, and the identification of a new, overall goal for advising. In an attempt to pilot study the advising program, 1,380 incoming freshmen and faculty members participated in a predesigned registration program. The faculty program materials consisted of self-assessment questionnaires, directions to be given to students, a checklist and resource sheet, and catalogs. Students received a schedule book and registration materials. Prepared programs informed students of general university requirements and directions for completing the questionniares. Faculty advising, which lasted on the average of 1 hour per student, followed the prepared program. Both students and faculty evaluated the program after the advising sessions. An analysis of the results showed that the most significant accomplishment of the program was to identify the overall goal of advising. Faculty gained more awareness of student options and the complexities of advising. The majority of students felt the program was beneficial. (The assessment instruments are appended.) (Author/BL)

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A Mandatory Freshman Advising Program in a University of 9,000 Undergraduate Students

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Running Head: A Mandatory Freshman Advising Program

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Abstract

Issues of retention are a major concern at Towson State University, as they are at colleges and universities throughout the country. A committee to study retention and address the issues was appointed in the fall of 1981 by the University's president. Since January of 1982, the committee's work has been funded by a grant from the National Council on Higher Education Management Systems in conjunction with the Kellogg Foundation. The work of the committee and other researchers has linked retention to advising. Further, the freshman class has been identified as the most appropriate target group for an expansive and comprehensive advising program. This paper describes the development and implementation of such a freshman advising program. The program is mandatory in nature, involves a self-assessment tool for students, and includes a preliminary training session for faculty advisers. The program has helped Towson State in achieving the overall goal of helping students to become informed and self-aware decision-makers. Additionally, faculty are becoming increasingly aware of the complexities and significance of the advising process.

A Mandatory Freshman Advising Program in a University of 9,000 Undergraduate Students

Towson State University, an institution of approximately 9,000 full-time day students and 6,000 part-time students, like other institutions throughout the country, is concerned about issues of retention. Retention has been studied from the position of many outcomes (Trombley and Holmes, 1981; Kramer, 1982; Beal and Noel, 1980). Nationwide, the reports are that 40% of students who matriculate fail to graduate; for some populations such figures are higher (Pantages and Creedon, 1978). For this reason, in the fall of 1981 the President of TSU, Dr. Smith, appointed a university committee to study retention and to make recommendations. The work of this committee has been funded by the National Council on Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS)/ Kellogg grant on student outcomes since January of 1982. As is the case at other universities, retention has become linked to advising (Trombley and Holmes, 1981; Smith, 1983; Landry, 1981). This paper describes a plan for a freshman advising program. The hallmarks of this plan are: the mandatory nature of the program; the increased awareness provided to faculty of the complexities in the advising process; the use of a self-assessment tool for the students advised; the merger of Academic Affairs and Student Services to implement the program; and finally, the identification of a new goal for advising.

This paper was presented at the American Personnel & Guidance Association's Annual Convention in Washington, D.C., March 20-23, 1983. The authors gratefully acknowledge the assistance of Tracy Miller and Jan Sherrill, of Student Services, for their contributions toward the development, implementation, and modification of the advising program.

Towson State has for many years had an orientation and advising program which has been available to all incoming freshman. After the students are admitted, they are assigned to one day of orientation. During this one day, individual advising is available with faculty members. The body of research supports the notion that advising communicates to students that faculty care and are capable of helping them in their selection of program (Watkins, 1983; Peabody and Sedlack, 1983; Landry, 1981). Yet, approximately one-fourth of the incoming freshman class generally declines to take advantage of that opportunity and comes for a later program in which no individual advising is available. Although many Towson students have tended to get help from faculty in meeting specific major requirements, many times the faculty have not been aware of all of the details of the General University Requirements. The General Requirements for graduation from our university have become increasingly complex. One of the problems has been that large numbers of students, as many as 40%, have failed to meet the requirements for graduation and are denied their degree at the time of application for graduation because of this. We have thus identified not only a need for advising throughout the four-year program, but also a need for training of faculty as advisers.

A few special non-faculty advisers have been available for students. Sometimes a department's secretary may have acted as an adviser, whether designated as such or not. Advising has ranged from lengthy conversation to signing an approval card for registration. One of the difficulties that is probably universal with regard to delivering advising on a voluntary basis is that students don't recognize that they need some help, someone's signature, or some advice until the time that pre-registration materials are due. Most

students show up during a short period of time and faculty who wish to deliver advising find themselves simply answering specific questions or signing permission cards. In the past we have tried to assign time slots for advising prior to pre-registration deadlines but comparatively few students took advantage of that. In addition, although faculty are in their offices during office hours, the students tend to confer with each other to decide which courses to select for the following semester. With these facts in mind, it soon became obvious to us that if a student came to us at all for advising it had been either to passively seek out someone to tell him or her what to take (being unprepared to question the process actually taking place) or to seek out the adviser only for a signature of permission to take already chosen courses.

Method

Participants

The problem was how to effectively provide a program for all students at the University. We decided to identify a target group, in this case, first-year, full-time day students already matriculated in the University. It was decided to select only the freshmen to see if the attrition rate from the freshman to sophomore year could eventually be reduced by an intensive program in the freshman year. Other researchers have described the freshmen as an appropriate target (Landry, 1981; Beal and Noel, 1980). Although we recognized that the most ideal advising is one to one, it was agreed that it would be impossible at this time to deliver such a program. If all students were to have sought advising during appropriate office hours we would have been able

to accommodate all advising needs; but if we were to mandate a program, there would be no way that we could mandate sufficient individual advising times.

The next question involved the choice of appropriate advisers. In the literature there is discussion of the pros and cons of using faculty as opposed to specific administrative personnel who are advisers (Trombley and Holmes, 1981; Landry, 1981). From a practical point of view, Towson State could only choose faculty. We were not in the position to hire additional advisers, nor do we have the appropriate administrative personnel in the quantity needed for this project. Philosophically, we were committed to faculty as the appropriate people for advising, not only because these are the people with whom students would be working throughout their college career, but also because of the unique perspective that faculty can bring to students concerning the value of their own educational experiences. We further hoped that students would develop a familiarity with faculty so that they could rely on faculty in the future and see them as a major resource (Trombley and Holmes, 1981; Landry, 1981; Kramer, 1982).

With these basic questions answered, a university-wide commitment began with the agreement among the Academic Affairs Division, the Student Services Division, and the President of the University that this program would take place, would be designed by Student Services, and would be implemented by faculty. It was agreed that the Student Services Division would handle all the logistics and invitations to the students. All materials to be used were designed by Student Services and used as a means for training faculty. Faculty participation and suggestions were requested at each step of the way. The design and implementation of the program also involved the other divisions

of the University. Further, the Vice President for Academic Affairs agreed to provide, for each time slot, the number of faculty needed to deliver a ten student to one faculty member ratio. Each dean was assigned a certain number of faculty for each of the five sessions. Faculty were not only to attend the student advising sessions but were to attend a training session prior to this. The training sessions were held one week prior to the advising sessions and followed the same schedule, with the duplication of time slots. An additional two advising session time slots were set up, however, for students who failed to attend the sessions for which they had been scheduled. Arrangements were also made for students to be able to change the time of the advising session to which they were assigned. The most significant problem was how to get students to attend, as past efforts to assign them to faculty or groups had not been successful. We decided to make the advising mandatory by providing that students could get their preregistration materials at the advising sessions only, and that these sessions would be held prior to the regular preregistration time. Students would also have access to the schedule booklets before the scheduled release of them.

For the purpose of this program we chose to include all freshmen who had entered the University with less than twelve semester hours credit. All students who entered the summer program for orientation, whether in the individualized program or in the group program, were scheduled for one of five mandatory advising sessions. The Registrar provided for us five time slots which he believed would provide each student with an appropriate time opening for an advising session. Registration for the advising session was done through the Registrar as would be that for a regular course, with both the time and the

specific section number appearing on the schedule. In this case, the section number represented the table to which the student would be assigned.

Procedure

In establishing an agenda for the advising sessions, we defined the goal of all advising programs at Towson State to be for students to become informed decision-makers. The goal included helping the students to gain a broader perspective on the selection of courses, to include personal, social, physical, and emotional needs. Also among the things that advising may give students is knowledge of the variety of options available within the University but beyond specific course suggestions. In order to achieve the new goal, a self-assessment questionnaire was designed for students to use as a basis for discussion within advising groups (see appendix). The self-assessment questionnaire sensitizes the student to question various aspects of his or her personality, including goals and achievements regarding academic, social, physical, career, and major college needs, as well as habits regarding use of time. Resource information as to how to address the needs that were identified was to be provided to faculty.

Specific objectives of the program were that the student would become an informed, competent and self-aware decision-maker; gain a better understanding of degree requirements; gain increased awareness of options available on campus; come to understand registration procedures; and be exposed to faculty perspectives on the university experience. Consequently, related objectives for the program were for faculty to increase their awareness of the role of advising and retention, of the vulnerability of certain sub-groups (such as

the undeclared major) to attrition, and of the details of the academic regulations. We also hoped that faculty would gain a broader understanding of both curricular and extracurricular options available to the students. Thus, in the faculty training program, advising was defined and the overall goal presented with the specific objectives of the program (Trombley and Holmes, 1981; Strickle, 1982).

There was some time spent in the training program in going over the self-assessment questionnaire and how it might be used in the advising process. For each of the areas where students might be feeling some need for further assistance there was a resource list from which faculty could make suggestions. The list included information on how to get these needs met through course work, through extracurricular offerings, and through specific remedial help. An adviser's suggestions would vary in accordance with the needs of the student who was having trouble in deciding which avenue to choose. We suggested that some students would gain more by a sampling of courses across the spectrum, other students might go to some of the career guidance workshops, and still others may prefer an individual appointment through the Counseling Center. In each of these areas we identified how the problems could be addressed through the curriculum and through the other offerings of the University. In addition, General University Requirements were explained to the faculty during the faculty training sessions. Faculty were then urged to offer students further time with them in their offices. Also, faculty identified some problems that had not been anticipated in the planning. For example, there was concern among faculty about dealing in the group with some questionnaire responses that could be considered personal. This concern has

persisted and will lead to some revisions in the program. Finally, each faculty member was told the table assignment where he or she would be meeting the students.

Results

Our advising programs have been designated TRIAD II and III for the first and second semesters, respectively. Since our summer orientation is called TRIAD, these designations communicate to faculty and students that this is a continuation of the orientation and advising process begun prior to the students' first semester at the University. In the advising sessions, faculty were equipped with the questionnaires, a copy of all directions given to students, a checklist and resource sheet, and catalogs. Every student was provided with a schedule booklet and preregistration materials. Upon their arrival, students knew from the mailings that they were to go to a particular table, the number of which was listed as a section number. Ten minutes were allowed for them to find their seats, then a 10-minute program began with an explanation of the General University Requirements and directions for filling out the self-assessment questionnaire. The program was then in the hands of each faculty member. Although the students received their materials as soon as they got to the table, few students left before forty-five minutes had passed. The sessions were two hours in length and the students stayed for an average of one hour. The formally prepared program was less than 25 minutes long, however. At the end of the TRIAD II pre-registration program, students were told to sign-up for the following semester's TRIAD III program.

There were 1,540 students assigned to the TRIAD II program; 1,380 students attended. About 10% of these completed their preregistration during the session. There were 136 faculty who participated as trained advisers. Although each session was scheduled for two hours, the average length of time for a student to stay was about one hour. Before leaving, 600 students who participated completed and turned in the form provided for evaluating the program. A summary of the results is included in Table 1. A different evaluation form was completed by 122 of the faculty advisers. A summary of these results is included in Table 2.

Discussion

A great deal has been accomplished through the development, implementation, and modification of Towson State's mandatory freshman advising program. One of the most significant accomplishments of the program is that we at the University have identified a new overall goal for advising: to provide the student with the ability to make informed decisions regarding his or her university career. In the process, more faculty have become more aware of the wide variety of options available to students and have gained an increased awareness of the complexities of the advising process. Also, a new university-wide committee has been formed for maintaining cooperative efforts between Student Services and Academic Affairs in order to expand the advising services to eventually include all undergraduate students. The committee is intended to provide definitions, goals, and objectives for specific advising programs. In the meantime, the University has scheduled TRIAD II and III as regular, required experiences.

TABLE 1

Student Evaluation of TRIAD II

		Yes		No	
		n	%	n	%
1.	Was there sufficient time for advising?	551	95.8	24	4.2
2.	Do you feel that the group was small enough so that your individual needs were met?	557	96.7	19	3.3
3.	Do you understand how to meet the General University Requirements?	553	96.5	20	3.5
4.	Do you understand the Pass/Fail option?	511	89.2	62	10.8
5.	Do you understand the number of credits and the minimum grades necessary to remain in good standing?	542	94.4	32	5.6
6.	Do you know yourself better as a student?	503	82.1	110	17.9
7.	Do you have a better idea of the demands placed on you by the University and by your time schedule?	541	94.1	34	5.9
8.	Do you have a better idea of the options available to you both intra- and extra-curricularly?	486	84.5	89	15.5
9.	Do you understand the procedures for pre-registration?	548	96.5	20	3.5
10.	Was the perspective of the faculty advisor helpful to you?	548	97.3	15	2.7
11.	List any areas not covered that you feel should be included				

TABLE 2

Faculty Evaluation of TRIAD II*

1. What seemed to concern the students most?
   a) GUR's
   b) choosing a major and understanding major requirements
   c) the heat
   d) course availability

2. What seemed to require the most extensive explanation?
   a) GUR's
   b) completing course request card
   c) declaring a major
   d) pass/fail option

3. To what extent did you counsel students in specific course selection?
   a) little
   b) some
   c) none
   d) a lot

4. What items should be modified in the self-assessment questionnaire next time around?
   a) change nothing
   b) make it more interesting and more important to students
   c) it shouldn't be done with strangers
   d) eliminate the questionnaire
   e) condense it

5. Do you have any suggestions for improvement?
   a) give faculty more training
   b) give students a list of available resources
   c) cater only to students having trouble registering
   d) seat people with similar majors together
   e) make TRIAD III optional

*Listed in decending order for each question are those four or five responses most frequently given.

Now that participating freshmen are in their second semester, they appear to have gained some adequate information from which to assess their problems and to plan their future. Those with special academic problems will be provided with special academic advising, as will those students who have grade point averages under 2.0 on a 4.0 scale. Those who are below 1.0 will be meeting in groups with the Director of the Tutorial Services Center to talk about how they might plan a future program and how they may reinstate themselves in a college program should they be dismissed at the end of the semester. The students with grade point averages from 1.0 to 1.9 will be individually assigned to faculty. Four students are being scheduled with each faculty member who has volunteered for that program. Pre-registration materials for those students will be sent to the appropriate faculty member's office.

As a result of student and faculty evaluations, we are beginning to modify the program. The self-assessment questionnaire for the next TRIAD II will carry its own resource list and thus become a self-help questionnaire. A grid for plotting time demands will continue to be something that is shared with faculty, however, so that faculty can assist the students in electing the number of semester hours to carry for the following semester. The self-help questionnaire for TRIAD III is also different and is intended to identify the developmental changes in a second semester student, who may have now begun to move more decisively in some specific direction as a result of better informed decision-making.

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Appendix

TRIAD II - SELF-ASSESSMENT QUESTIONNAIRE

College is a new experience for everyone, and adjusting to it is a process. The purpose of this form is to assist you in helping you to better understand your needs and to give you a framework for decision-making in the future.

This form is designed as a guideline for you and for your working with your advisor. It is not to be seen by anyone other than those to whom you choose to show it. Our purpose is to assist you to understand your needs and to give you a framework for decision-making at the present time and in the future.

Part I

What Courses Are You Presently Taking	Test and Quiz Grades to Date	Check Your Favorite Courses

What courses, if any, have you dropped?

Part II

1. Have you declared a major? If so, what is your major?
2. Have you contacted your major department?
3. Are your views about your major choice the same as they were when you came to Towson?
4. Would you like some assistance in understanding how to choose a major?
5. Are you planning to go to graduate school?

Part III - Indicate your satisfaction in the following areas:

Academic Skills:

1. Meeting your own expectation in performing college level work:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
2. Identifying subjects you are best at:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
3. Reading well:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

4. Writing well:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
5. Meeting professors' expectations:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

See Resource Sheet, Part A.

Habits Needed for Academic Success

6. Disciplining yourself for study:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
7. Pacing yourself and not leaving things until the last minute:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
8. Interaction with faculty outside of class:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
9. Amount of leisure time:
   Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
10. Managing time well:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
11. Being able to concentrate, keeping free of distractions:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

See Resource Sheet, Part A.

Physical Well-Being

12. Eating a well-balanced diet at regular times:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
13. Getting in some physical activity:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
14. Maintaining good physical health:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
15. Keeping a good physical appearance:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
16. Knowing how to relax:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
17. Managing alcohol and drugs:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

See Resource Sheet, Part B.

Social Well-Being

18. Making new friends:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
19. Keeping old friends:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
20. Getting along with parents:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
21. Getting along with roommates/classmates:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied
22. Getting involved in activities:
    Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

See Resource Sheet, Part B.

Coping Skills

23. Handling emotional conflict:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

24. Adjusting to the Towson State University environment:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

25. Amount of independence from home:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

26. Seeking emotional support when needed:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

27. My own decision-making:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

See Resource Sheet, Part B.

Career Planning Skills

28. Understanding the career-planning process:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

29. Knowing what resources to use on campus:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

30. Knowing my interests, abilities and values:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

31. Knowing how to select a major:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

32. Being able to make career decisions:
Satisfied Uncertain Dissatisfied

See Resource Sheet, Part C.

Part IV

1. Approximately how many hours a week do you study?
2. Are your study facilities adequate for your needs?
3. At what time in the morning are you ready to take a class?
4. At what time in the afternoon are you less able to concentrate?

Part V

1. Do you plan to continue at Towson next semester?
Yes Uncertain No